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ABSTRACT

The impact of the new communication technology is analyzed in this paper in the context of cities and urbanization. The paper explores the concurrent decline of central cities and that of the mass media, as well as the rise of decentralization and "suburbanization" and the rise in media specialization. It suggests that the increase in multiple media with many centers may bring a new city or "mediapolis" in the postindustrial, information-centered society. The paper notes the response of central city daily newspapers to the urban crisis, the decline in the old print media, and the rise of the electronic newspaper. It reviews the proposed use of new communications technology as a tool for utopias and technocracy in relationship to the efforts to rebuild the old cities and create new ones. The paper raises questions about the negative impact of new communications technology, such as decreases in interpersonal contacts, threats to privacy, and dangers of communications overload. In addition, it probes the possible impact of the pluralistic communities of geography and interest on the political dilemmas of metropolitan areas without a central government. The paper calls attention to the continuing media fixation on geography and centrality, and cites the need for a sophisticated and comprehensive information specialist in the newsroom of the future. (Author/FL)

QUALITATIVE STUDIES DIVISION

URBAN USES AND SOCIAL IMPACT OF NEW COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY: A CRITICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

by

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Mediapolis in the Post-Industrial Society

It is difficult to separate society and technology from urbanization and communication. The traditional city has been tied to print and the railroads like the new metropolitan areas are linked to the electronics of cable, the computer, phones and jets. The unlikely coincidence of the decline of mass media and the central city suggests that the concurrence of suburbanization and media specialization may lead to a new configuration of "mediapolis".

Perhaps the true "new journalism" of the 1960s was the rise of special urban audiences as the decline of metro dailies and mass magazines and the move from broad to "narrow"-casting all signal a new city of many centers and multiple mediums replacing the "one-newspaper" towns. The chorus singing "Goodbye Gutenberg" and "Hello Electronic Highway" heralds the "liberating technology" with the tyrics of telematic, technotronic, telecommunications, and information societies, and proclaims the wired communications city and other urban utopias of Babel and The City of God.

Some might list this analysis under that category of communications research that "includes the inventive essays wherein the authors attempt to provide a sense of the future without too heavy an anchoring in the past. These are the most illusionistic efforts as well as the most imaginative. They are the most needed, but the least reliable."[3] However, this attempt will examine the new communications technology (NCT) in a needed context--the city, a logical, local and longtime available lab.[4] Such a context is oddly missing from most recent assessments of NCT, which are probed in the abstraction of "society" and the national consumer market of policy, engineering, services and systems rather than the concrete experience of people living in a local community.

Over the past 20 years, there have been sporadic attempts to study communications and urbanization,[5] but few efforts to "analyze the impact of communication on urban change"[6] by planners and urban thinkers in a position to actually affect that change. Communications have not been seen as "bricks and mortar" although "the cabling that provides these facilities becomes as important as the water pipes and electric supply" in the telematic society.[7]

"Communication systems must be considered a major component of the urban infrastructure . . . involving people, goods, energy and information"[8] and not merely a part of past growth and history. Furthermore, cable "has the potential for radically altering the very concept of the urban community. Entirely new perceptions of community life may develop . . . . the very term 'city' will no longer be a useful term for symbolizing the urban way of life."[9]

Focus on NCT in the city context provides a chance to re-open the debate on the definition of the city and perhaps a re-definition not tied to the geography of old central place by print technology, but

re-shaped to the realities of electronic communications in the age of the computer, cable and telecommunications. The forces of decentralization and the dilemmas of print communications are inter-mixed with the predicaments of central city decision-makers and citizens facing communities of specialized interests based upon electronic pluralism. Notions of the general public interest, already fractured with the decline of the city face, the revolt against mass communications, and a highly interactive communications system involving feedback by minorities.

Technology to Cure and Create

When the "urban crisis" was high on the agenda of the alarmed central city dailies 15 to 20 years ago, NCT was often seen as a means to solve old city problems or to create a New Jerusalem to escape from The dreamers and utopians envisioned communications as a means to create rather than a tool to consume in the national information network. Economist Robert Theobold saw city and communications as inseparable. "I do not believe that this vision can be found in glorifying the present city, for there is little there to praise. Rather, we must discover the new vision of community in an electronic, communications era. We must do this of course, within the context of disintegrating community."[10]

Some who still hoped the city would remain the seat of civilization heard Marshall McLuhan bid farewell to roads and paper routes as metropolitan space was "irrelevant for the telephone, the telegraph, the radio and television".[11] It was alarming at the time to hear the crisis of mass media and community identity, as "Increasing personal mobility in America's growing interurban regions may make meaningless the classical designations of community as terms defined in space which determines social allegiances and social ties".[12]

The possible impacts of the NCT was adorned with hopes that it might create a new city while dealing with the old one. One mathemati-

cian said "I see the city of 1990 as a gigantic depository of information as a major node in the computer-communications network" where rural and suburban residents with video phones and television need not go to the declining central city where the same information technology would solve the problems of crime, traffic, and medical services.[13] One optimistic management expert for the Rand Corporation predicted urban information nodes would create cities of tomorrow--"... the Platonic city, with links and flows being established to many other cities. As this network continues to expand and enlarge, all the world may eventually be said to be one city."[14] (Emphasis in original)

The large, old city had become "an anachronism" and a "death trap" and a "trend against all reason", reasoned a physicist, who suggested that NCT could enhance an outward spread of urbanization where people wished to live and at the same time arrest the growth of slums, drug addiction, and traffic with electronic camera surveillance and personal burglar alarms.[15] Both business and federal officials saw NCT building new experimental cities and solving urban crises. Wide band systems in the 1980s were seen as "absolutely necessary if the nation is going to find solutions to growing, pollution, urban traffic and inner city transportation problems", as well as increase the availability of education, culture and home entertainment.[16] An enthusiastic FCC Commissioner Nicholas Johnson said "The tools are at hand to make urban life governable and liveable---if only we will take them up. Innovations in communications technology are crashing upon us like waves of a stormy sea upon the beach."[17]

One journalist saw cable television as "a stunning liberation of the medium for all manner of groups of neighborhoods. Decentralization of television is not only technically and economically possible now, but

it's also entirely desirable in terms of any organic definition of what democracy ought to be and can be."[18] Another said if NCT had been used to instruct rural people, they might not have moved to cities, but once there, NCT could help ordinary people adjust to it and prevent them from being passive recipients of monopolized media content.[19] The NCT was seen as humanistic in potential, bringing rural and city people together on common problems,[20] so that "Individualized news and information services about government and civic affairs could help bring primary groups back into range".[21] It "will eliminate their feeling of frustration, helplessness and powerlessness" by "enabling the grouping of all city residents into continuously flexible subsystems: ethnic, racial and other culture-dependent groups (who) can be linked by their like interests whenever desired."[22]

While the notion of a general urban public interest seemed to be assigned to mechanical determinism and media content somewhat ignored, the anticipated NCT effects did cement the notion that information can be an urban product and that geographic place might not be crucial. Rand Corporation studies of cable television in Dale City, Va., and Lakewood, Ohio, found little interest in local programming content,[23] and use of NCT in new towns and experimental cities was highly mechanistic and dealt less with interaction based on communication and information,[24] but new definitions of community were postulated. Social issues of politics, education, health, crime and integration crossed physical boundaries along with the NCT, and one historical and city planning perspective was to "abandon the spatial model of the city" and have the city resident see community as "the set of people, roles, and places with whom he communicates".[25]

Probably the most ambitious, optimistic and concrete activity

to use NCT revolved around retiring CBS research director Peter Goldmark working with the Department of Housing and Urban Development and Fairfield (Conn.) University to use "remedial telecommunications to alleviate city problems" and create the "city of the future" in rural areas where NCT would allow escape from high urban density and its problems and at the same time convey the benefits of big city life.[27]

The rationale involves the use of an intricate series of NCT networks linking facilities and services in the central city, and similar linkages to tie small town and regional offices and outposts to permit people to "communicate rather than commute" to cities. Goldmark said "I believe the magnitude of this task will make going to the moon seem like a ferry-boat ride."[28] (Ironically, Goldmark was killed in an auto accident before he realized fully his dreams.)

The use of NCT to create urban utopias or to escape old dystopias has been a theme soaked with escape and decentralization from central place. Psychologist B.F. Skinner of Walden Two envisions small town flight from big cities through modern transportation and communication,[29] and educator Lawrence J. Peter's The Peter Plan creates "Excelsior City" with "honest communication" and "people-powered" urban planning systems independent of many mechanistic technologies.[30] The science fiction writers project the NCT in apocalyptic and romantic visions of liberation from the obsolete old city which "can be replaced by wires and microwave relays". As one writer puts it, "I like the idea of the world of the exploded city--'Don't commute, communicate!'--in which everyone does his own thing in his own place, linked to one another by electronic media rather than physical proximity."[31]

The negative aspects of such decentralization are often not emphasized, and there have been relatively few "systematic social scientific

analyses" of its consequences.[32] Urbanologist Lewis Mumford "has argued that electronics has intensified the most destructive and power-oriented tendencies of printing, whereas McLuhan has argued that electronics has produced or will produce a qualitative change in the nature of social organization and cultural life".[33] That analysis is related to what James Carey also calls the myths of the electric and electronic revolution in which "secular theologians" of decentralization and democratic localism "hail electrical techniques as the motive force of desired social change, the key to the re-creation of a humane community, the means for returning to a cherished naturalistic bliss".[34]

Renewed Interest in Urban Communications Technology

Some of the enthusiasm for NCT to cure old city problems and to create new cities waned in the 1970s. The revival of the old central city as the nucleus of urban civility had largely failed and was seen as "too utopian" to expect in 20 years as "we are moving toward an urban civilization without great cities--and . . . this movement is so without precedent that prophecies of doom or hopes of utopia are both premature."[35]

With a diminution in the urban crisis imperative, the metaphor of the city with NCT abated, although there continued the parade of applause for the republic of technology, the creative computopia of the information society, the third wave of communications, a micro electronic revolution and television explosion, and electronic cottage.[36] Some faded urban hopes seemed to be replaced with sole faith in unlimited electronic technology. The engineers are quoted by one journalism educator:[37]

> The capacity of technology for delivering information electronically has no real limits. It is restricted only by the desires of the public and by imagination of people responsible for

providing information . . . . So imagination is the only limitation. That doesn't leave very much that technology cannot deliver, does it ?" (Emphasis in original)

Engineering and technology had brought the Sat-Com satellite and renewed urban interest in NCT as cities rushed for franchises and "belatedly started to wake up" as the "future arrived officially" for the wired nation after nearly 10 years in gestation.[38] [39] There was hardware for sale and a business impetus for the "wired city of the future" which "has long been the province of such authors as George Orwell and Alvin Toffler" but "is no longer the stuff of science fiction".[40]

Another industrial organ reported that the "home information revolution" is no longer just in the minds of "flaky academics", but "in the nation's retain stores and in the board rooms of some of the nation's largest and wealthiest corporations."[41] The market made NCT relevant. The urban crisis was low on the media agenda. Autos could still escape to suburban sprawl despite fuel crises. Skyscrapers might still block minority cable access, but minorities were disillusioned, and mountains were no obstacle to suburbanites receiving cable where the penetration was the greatest for several reasons: cheaper and easier to wire for typical young subscribers; fewer poor to disturb the demographics; and fewer minorities to demand access in franchises.[42]

The local impact of the NCT could become a renewed concern if no national cable policy results from federal deregulation and as power shifts to city regulation and control. Any assessment of such impact with models, scenarios or utopias tends to include an element of fortune telling because of the futuristic aspects of any new "drug" on the market.[43]

Already, there is skepticism that NCT will solve public problems. Some say it cannot change values and social organization although it can change things--buildings, transit systems, communications equipment--

but technology "is not the answer for cities".[44] A more likely question arising on the agenda is "what will happen to social interactions" if NCT "expands to replace banking and shopping, public meetings, and even public schools".[45]

Two of the few relatively comprehensive assessments of the urban impact of NCT[46] indicate that it could increase the gap between central city poor areas (where there remains a limited, territorial, spatial notion of community), and the suburbs, (where auto-mated movement makes community less geographical.) Less educated urbanites would have to learn the technology and realize that pushing buttons creates actions with consequences for extended social interactions.

Increased telecommunications might also increase social isolation and alienation if people stayed home and avoided social spontaneity. They might also stop writing as they depend on the phone, and excessive information overload and invasions of privacy might cause a "Luddite reaction" against technology.[47]

One analysis based on field studies indicates that "there is little doubt that the impact of this new technology on urban development will be substantial" by extending the impact of electricity on such things as neighboring and retailing, the extended family, branch banking, high rise buildings, recreation and leisure, rural living and suburban growth. It could reduce population by family planning and consumer health programs, and changes in family employment and living patterns. Also it could control population densities, reinforce social diversity, and aid the urban economic base by allowing new industries to locate outside big cities and save both energy and money.[48]

However, dangers from the NCT include the chance that the poor and and disadvantaged would be abandoned in the central city as remote shopping

would reduce city and suburban contact, with downtown a mere television terminal and diverse and segregated populations viewing only their own kind on the screen.[49] Another negative scenario is one in which the government might use NCT to control the central city and prevent decentralization. The positive technology of warnings for fire, burglary and natural disaster might be used as remote, impersonal surveillance in malls and streets rather than produce the new, integrated, participant democracy.[50]

A dysfunctional society of NCT might mean wired schools for drug control and behavior modification far beyond bussing; abandoned downtowns with electronic banking at home; electronic mail for large corporations and institutions; telemedicine without the psychology of healing hands; and telecommuting for select, white collar central business district transactions. There are "dangers of bigger class splits because the first telecommuters will be the affluent, who may therefore learn less about ordinary people than ever as they work in electronic isolation from the underprivileged".[51]

Positive elements in city life might also emerge: schools less of a place and more of a process; more home recreation through video games removed from public friction and the fanatacism of public ceremonies; less air pollution and reduced traffic accidents, and landmarks safe from parking lot asphalt; computerized traffic and public chance to both plan and use transit; greater self-help and home care for the sick plus less costly office calls and crowded medical centers and wider medical diagnoses and prescriptions.

For business and commerce in the cities, telecommuting and teleconferencing means possible regional dispersal to reduce congestion and costs,[52] although housing patterns might confine minorities to the central cities where jobs might be restricted to the pre-industrial

era. As for telecommuting, "the finer nuances of communication are not necessary for the kind of messages that flow between executives and the routine office plant" and questions remain on "how far we think electronic communications can become an effective substitute for face-to-face meetings in the future metropolis".[53] Even in a decentralized, information city, business elites still tend to congregate in the central business district.[54] Indications are that major psychological, organizational and social aspects are involved in telecommuting, and "it is surprising to find that such questions have been neglected."[55]

As for urban leisure and recreation, the impact might be greatest on creative occupations at home and geographically dispersed and energy efficient activity.[56] Costly symphony and stadium tickets once usable only near the CBD or in suburbia might move closer to the hearth, with the TV studio a possible new "stadium" site.[57] The possibilities arise that greater isolation and more mediation of heroes and models might increase vicarious recreation, mental drug "trips", and less participation in public life and spectacle. Such pseudo-self-awareness might reduce interaction with others and promote the culture of narcissism.[58]

In regard to the natural environment, NCT is emerging as a remote sensing device to forecast natural disasters, assess site locations, detect available natural resources, monitor rescue efforts and prevent the need for them. The built environment of utility lines might also be hidden, and science fiction already suggests that microfiche "tombstones" and audio-visual wills might replace cemeteries, mortuaries and perhaps some lawyers.

Decentralization: Devil or Angel for Communications Technology

The decline of the old central city serves as a convenient and logical context for assessing the impact of the NCT on the fragmentation, dispersal and decision-making in the metropolis; the form, structure

and image of the city; the polity of the metropolis; and the response of established media (mainly print dailies) facing a new type of city.

Central place and downtown are no longer the major focus of the metropolitan area. The decline (and some say maybe demise) of the central business district and the traditional city coincide with the decline of the mass media.[59] Radio and television can cross geographical boundaries faster and easier than print. Newspapers remain near downtown --far below skyscraper antennas and far removed from suburbia. The old downtown movie houses have declined[60] and with the new electronic storage and retrieval systems, "Maybe the general circulation public library is a passing institution like Sunday band concerts in the town square".[61]

Telephones have helped spread out the city from the center by helping separate jobs and homes and within the old city facilitated skyscrapers' internal communication and the number of elevators.[62] City limits, once measured by newspaper circulation, might now be more accurately delimited by television market areas.[63]

Metropolitan form is being affected by the NCT and the computer linked to electronic communication creates information machines which "may change the shape of our cities".[64] The "immediate environment of the city clearly then will be electronic" as space and place become less important as a means to define the city.[65] Even the need for one center for the metropolis may be unnecessary, and instead several types of cities (educational, scientific, recreational, communications), inasmuch as "the city now is only one kind of a waystation."[66]

If there are many centers, what will be the central mental picture of the metropolis. Will "mediapolis" need a "civic shorthand" in order for citizens to grasp its wholeness ? In the past, the daily newspapers created and guarded the civic profile from the geographical center,[67] and local TV affiliates of networks have projected similar images, but with

potential multiple and competing NCT images, where will the central computer terminal be located ?

As the metropolis remains too large for a total experience by all its residents, image mediation is likely to continue, with perhaps more public awareness of smaller enclaves, nodes and pathways, and landmarks, which can be preserved (on film or plastic) and retrieved at will. Also, with mobile urban communications and the van life, a less fixed idea of the geographical city center may emerge. Add to that the expanding television "city limits", expanding post office zip and phone area codes, and mental maps from outer space--the last suburbia![68]

Regional images of weather and sports on television may create new images of urban regions, which already are the basis for proposals by geographers and journalists, who suggest re-naming geographical areas to adjust to outdated state boundaries, and to accommodate movements for regional autonomy and secession, all stimulated in part by modern transportation and communication.[69]

The need for journalists to re-define community seems evident. Such definitions might consider a mix such as geographical (e.g. neighborhoods, suburbs, small towns) and the related media communities(e.g. weekly, daily, viewers, listeners); but also communities of interest and life style(e.g. age, race, sex, and class).[70] Already, the production, dissemination, and usage of NCT content is shifting territories and boundaries in the information marketplace,[71] with a potential for a new mental and market "architecture".

The social and political implications of these images and realities could be staggering. If anyone with a home-video computer console can create an image of reality and community by controlling content, will

the sum of the images provide a common glue to hold the metropolis together ? "Must we give up the hope of a culture shared by all men ?", if the NCT creates a public cleavage in which "The educated will choose more cultural features and the culturally deprived even more pornography and violence" ?[72]

The political implications are even more profound. "The new technology will tend to substitute for the mass media an interactive medium that can adjust to each user's desires and thus introduce into society a powerful force toward fragmentation and variety."[73] "If the local cable system serves to delimit the neighborhood to give a sense of community to a section of a city or to a suburb now mainly dependent on the central city media, then politics could become more decentralized, with less attention to the nation and the state and more to local issues."[74]

It is predicted that "The wired city could produce major changes in the political order. If information is power, then the more people who have access to it, the more will political power be dispersed."[75] This could be frustrating within the central city, where a fragmented citizenship with user-communications networks tied to a national media market and without a centralized local focus, might not enhance the existing decision-making machinery where metro areas have no local government and central city mayors' powers are severely limited by fractured governmental jurisdictions.

Even with existing mass media, mayors face regional urban agendas, but are saddled by a weak social and economic base with high demands and low productivity. Media slate those agendas for restricted mayors, while the press can live, vote and sell ads in the suburbs, while the political system has yet to adjust its boundaries to urban realities.[76]

The power of the central city to remain the major hub of the metropolis is weakened by the rise of pluralistic communications. If

there is still no metropolitan consensus for a political base to which mayors and other political leaders might respond, can consumer use of the NCT create concern for issues of substance ? Perhaps not. "For many users the message itself is unimportant, trivial; what is important is communicating anonymously yet personally to 'whoever is out there'. In a democracy based on individualism, there is something vital in allowing every person to be, in a sense, his own broadcaster."[77] The technological usage and its user become supreme as feedback comes first in the new look in utility communications:[78]

> ". . .your customers are the lifeblood of your activities, not your messages and not the media you employ to distribute your messages; these are only means to an end. A communicator's success has nothing to do with the quantity of his messages, it has everything to do with the impact on customer thinking, attitudes and behaviors. Paradoxically, the humanism and sensitivity implicit in such an understanding of customers can be afforded these days only with the cast iron coldness of technology".

A similar glorification of the NCT and its egalitarian cloak is seen in the argument that "even if some loss of social cohesion results from pluralistic telecommunications, this will be compensated for by the stimulus of diversity, by the opportunity for consumers to move from a passive to an active role, by reducing the fears of manipulation of opinion that inhere in the present system of scarcity and concentration."[79] Consumerism becomes citizenship in a market with many messages and choices. For political leaders facing the fractured metropolitan area and outdated political boundaries, governing becomes difficult, especially as a national political consensus is marketed through the media, which may even replace political parties.

The economics of the market allows a mobile, consumer-citizen to cross boundaries by using the NCT. "The substitution of communi-

ties of interest for geographical communities does not pose any obvious threat to democratic of humanistic values. On the contrary," that argument goes, "policy intervention designed to conserve the values of geographic localism may pose significant dangers to our civil liberties."[80] If the new consumer-citizen can thereby create competing civic agendas from his isolated communications chair and computer console, will he help resolve or complicate civic problems? If communications can be easily used to "reach out and touch someone", but urban reality discourages touching in the crowded subway or speaking to strangers, how can interpersonal, geographic responsibility be developed? The evidence indicates that the growth of NCT not only weakens existing powers, but prevents new ones, although it strengthens grass roots organizations.[81]

Local governmental control of communications is antithetical to the American tradition, and the role of communications in city development has been ignored, although municipal uses and control of some aspects of cable communications are not uncommon.[82] "It is remarkable that professionals concerned with the future of our cities have paid communications so little heed."[83] "Professional planners who should know better persist today in conventional predictions of future land use and population movement without sufficiently examing the new set of communications variables that turn their predictions topsy-turvy."[84]

These concerns with NCT are in the liberal political tradition and may reveal the paradox and conflict of a free urban communications system with the need for urban order and containment. The poorly defined or non-existent metropolitan public interest has often been assumed to grow out of the mechanics of NCT. The "technology of this miracle" was to be the "communications superhighway" for the voice

of the people if it was not "prevented from realizing its full potential only by greed and politics".[85] The town meeting was to be restored[86] by the NCT and it would "bring consolidation to our disjointed society, and for each of us, individually (the chance) to become an identifiable, responsive and significant member of that body" and create "solutions to our real social problems".[87]

Concerns were expressed in the 1960s as to whether NCT might help "part of a minority commonly neglected by television" as cities are "swallowed up by large arbitrary markets".[88] For Blacks especially, there was hope that access to and control of cable could "solve many problems and achieve a new plateau in self determination and self-fulfillment". Cable "could enable America's minorities to challenge the communications systems that exploit the ghettos, barrios and reservations. Control, ownership and operation of cable systems by minorities could provide economic and political leverage, and the management and technical expertise required to accomplish a dramatic break in the cycle of dependency and exploitation."[89]

However, such dreams came to naught for the most part as banks were reluctant to support Black enterprises, franchises agreed to some access channels, and Blacks joined into some parts of the larger operations of the urban market. Meanwhile, "the promise of CATV as an opportunity for black economic and community development has gone largely unrealized".[90] Blacks and other minorities were left to compete in the national market. Ironically, there were early fears of NCT as part of "the Orwellian nightmare long before 1984"[91] with possible "no-knock" police entries, the reduction of personal contacts in inner-city neighborhoods, and the mixed blessings involving security, privacy and surveillance.[92]

There were early fears that cable television content might merely reflect the marketed messages of special interest groups and that it "may well go the way of conventional TV".[93] Although a decade later, a major cable TV magnate, Ted Turner, accused the networks of being "the worst pollutants this country has ever seen".[94] One observation was that "As the 1980's begin, the trend in cable and pay cable suggests that centralized control and a resultant emphasis on the same kind of entertainment material of older film and television media, will continue for the immediate future."[95]

Failure of cable to deliver the choice, abundance and quality was blamed by one observer on the large media conglomerates serving the interests of corporate stockholders instead of a general public.[96] Still another voice warned of the dangers of the wired city and the electronic nightmare and threats to privacy and surveillance in the interactive system.[97] The possibility of a "new technological elite" with minorities excluded was still another warning,[98] and a pioneer in blending urbanization and communications, Melvin Webber, has warned that the dispersion capacity of the NCT may reinforce segregation. "In this context, the new communications systems may disserve those at the lower reaches of the income distribution and the lower social strata. . . .The distribution of benefits is not likely to fall out directly. No self-governing generator of equity is built into the new electronics."[99]

In this respect, the existing medium of the telephone was rediscovered in the 1960s as urbanites sought equity and access through the "hot-lines". They augmented communications overload and their usage indicated "increased dependency as urbanization increases".[100] For the central city minorities, the personalized access via phone could circumvent the mass medium of the established print daily. The renewed

use of the phone in the urban setting has since moved to the more sophisticated cassette counseling at one end and toward communications violence at the other with obscene calls and terrorists' use of phone calls to take "credit" for incidents challenging the establishment.

Televoting has also been used as a means of equity in the governmental process. It has been heralded as the "purest democracy" because it will decentralize power as never before" and "public opinion will become the law of the land".[101] It has been used extensively in Hawaii and New Zealand on growth and development referenda, and in the San Diego area, one of the largest cable cities, it is being considered to allow participation in city council debates and possibly to get public opinion on urban planning issues and appropriate technological solutions.[102]

However, "One criticism of such plans is that they may be the modern electronic equivalent of Caesar asking for thumbs-up or thumbs-down at Roman gladiator matches. Complicated but emotional political issues might be decided too quickly and without adequate study".[103] It might be noted that also in San Diego, a May 1981 special city election was conducted by mail over a 2-week period and brought the largest "turnout" in history for such a vote. (Video juries may also make the courtroom as insignificant as the voting booth.)

If NCT users at their private home computer switch-boards can build some equity into the new electronic society, they can also isolate themselves from public life and interaction and selectively segregate themselves with exposure to their own groups. Furthermore, if the decline of mass media continues in the metropolis, the chances may be reduced for one single medium to expose all groups and ideas to all audiences. That points to the crisis of "mediapolis"--multiple media and multiple centers without a central cohesion for "cityzenship".

Daily Newspaper Response to Decentralization

The decline of both the central city and its daily newspapers and the emergence of the marketed "electronic newspaper" are major signals of the adjustment dilemmas of print media to the realities of the NCT and urban decentralization. One observation is that "The death of the city marked the birth of the new technology".[104]

How both media and government respond will affect both the form and substance of the new metropolis. Newspapers "must constantly justify" their existence and "unless the current newspapers maintain their usefulness to their constitutencies, they may be replaced by other forms."[105] Part of the newspaper response began in the 1960s, when the urban crisis was atop the agenda. Saving the city meant prevention of decentralization and the dailies both participated in and observed moves for metropolitan government and for renewal of the downtown central business district.[106]

There was also press response by rushing to report on minority needs, special reporters on urban subjects, op ed pages, ombudsmen and more letters to editors to answer complaints of access, and some efforts to democratize the newsroom policy-making. The zoned sections and special suburban pages were beefed up, branch circulation offices instituted, and even some short-lived efforts by some to join the exodus to suburbia and start (or buy into) suburban operations. There were equally short-lived "marriages" with city hall on re-building the downtown, company diversification and the failing newspaper act to preserve communications monopoly, and an attempt to compete with radio and TV, whose speed and color were symbolized by the newscopters and rapid reports on traffic jams.

Many of the efforts failed or had small success. Technologically, the dailies were sluggish in adapting to cold type, and although some tried suburban printing plants, the new technology was slow in arriving. Small newsboys no longer "little merchants" on street corners were being replaced by big-salaried anchorpeople on TV reading headline "extras" as VDTs, viewdata, video-text and teletext emerged. The continuing death of the afternoon dailies was the final alarm bell.[107]

The press had been part of the metropolitan crisis it had reported: the exodus of white middle class readers to the suburbs via autos, which the dailies had never criticized; the loss of an advertising and circulation base and the rise of a lower income, television-viewing, non-reading audience; the difficulty of delivering newspapers to sprawling suburbs, to ghettos and central city apartments; the rise in suburban weekly readership and TV viewing and the editorial impossibility of covering such a wide area; and the high costs of newsprint and labor conflicts over production.

The newspaper's audience had moved and was "cut off intellectually and culturally from the geographic zone whose affairs it once dominated" and "The new total metropolitan construct had broken down the social habits on which newspaper circulation depended" and created a "convulsion within the system of marketing altering the whole picture of the community in which it circulates information."[108]

The marketed "use-paper" was an adjustment to fit the new demographics of readership needs: bolder graphics, more color, features for self-help and improvement, information to help cope with city problems, and in-depth stories--all packaged, promoted, and conveniently available.[109] Some newspapers have been accused of thereby slanting news for the affluent readers to attract advertisers and

neglecting the urban poor.[110] Others have been cited for compromising editorial integrity in the face of the economic decline of the central city.[111] Newspapers themselves might point to more women and minority editors in major cities such as Oakland and Los Angeles, although minorities as a whole are still a small percentage of the journalistic pool.

The dailies have been somewhat slow to change approaches to covering the city. They have continued to ignore the regional nature of the new metropolis despite the death of the old city. They tend to "structure themselves around the centrality fixation" thinking that "he who owns the center controls the periphery" although "forces which once made centrality inevitable now make decentralization workable".[112]

A radical re-definition of news beats and newsroom re-organization have been urged so that the daily press can concentrate on urban functions rather than geographic place.[113] New visual images of the decentralized metropolis have been proposed so that there is a better fit between the landscape experienced by citizens and the language used to it. Such images as epitome districts, fronts, strips, stacks, sinks and turf, terms coined by urban journalist Grady Clay, might also be televisable via NCT to project a new way to see the city.[114]

Mass media TV may "speak" to city form and image. "Television has been in many ways the ideal medium for the Age of Megalopolis. The television signal spreads out from a central point and reaches a large circle of the public in suburbs and distant towns treating them all alike, blotting out subtle historic distinctions between one community and its neighbor, districts that were expressed in the structure of newspaper markets but have nevertheless become worn down in the era of consumer sovereignty."[115]

As the new "mediapolis" emerges, print and electronic may blend.

Already "it appears the (city) magazine format can be transferred to television. If this is so, metropolitan magazines might find their competition is not solely newspapers or the other traditional media, but cable television" which can segment audiences profitably.[116] There is also evidence that the print magazine format is being adapted to the television "magazines" for electronic features.[117] In addition, the new electronic fact books on local communities are using computerized community information systems to circumvent monopoly by specialized bureaucrats and advanced data management.[118] Add to this the tendency for community weeklies to thrive with centralized printing and multiple outlets are increased.[119]

The daily newspaper might adjust to specialization and urban change by both functional reporting and by renewing its role as a reporter on the new information age and use of the NCT. One such idea is as follows:[120]

> Like the metropolis, the media seem unable to turn back even if established media industries seek to maintain the status quo. Paradoxically, while the media set the agenda of issues to be faced in our society, they have not yet dealt with the imperative issues of quality urban communication, particularly in terms of the opportunities implicit in the new technology. It is essential that our media be used to raise the issue of how media should be used. (Emphasis in original)

The information "beat" on dailies ranges somewhere in between the book reviews and TV criticism to the library ground-breaking and the city council vote on the cable franchise. Journalism schools and texts do not even dwell on how to cover the press. The education beat, which could encompass the whole spectrum of information seeking, delivery and culture transmission, usually is the "school board" beat. The closest to an economics beat is the business page, but dailies could enlarge it to include the production and distribution of information in the post-industrial society. How people can use the NCT to cope with problems of the city and to enlarge their urban experience provides plenty of

copy for how-to-do and self-help features.

A major focus in press coverage of the NCT seems to be the wild, futuristic claims for its impact, and battles over franchises, with cases of poor handling of mismanagement and political and economic details.[121] Analyses of the information industry are less common, but can be excellent when they appear.[122] A city public library used to be far removed from the city room and its own "morgue", and reporters who read a lot were considered "bookish" and isolated from the "real" world of the police station and county hospital. That may change as libraries are no longer symbols of past records, but a more and more lively retrieval system adjusting to multiple services and delivery options in the cities.[123] Also, "In urban and suburban public libraries, electronic innovations and transistor technology have bought the biggest changes in the ways that people use libraries".[124] "Libraries are about to be revolutionized in a decade and will be generating information remarkably like newspapers' current output. Jobs in libraries may offer the real sleeper control functions of the 1980s".[125]

In the future, or even now, who will control information in the new "mediapolis" ? If it is shared, what happens to the mass medium for creating a collective consensus ? Newspapers and its defenders argue that they "have a unique function and an unduplicated form. . . .(and) Neither form nor function can be well served by a product which is very much different from the ink-on-newsprint vehicle that is so commonplace today".[126]

A similar defense of one major urban medium suggests that "Only when the city is synonymous with the market can there be an identity between citizenship and the sense of belonging in a place, and thus between the audience and the medium".[127] Another opinion is in the context of concern over the NCT with its individualized power of consumer

choice of fact-less images allowing escape from a general audience. That perspective is that "Information systems carry their own symbolic value in addition to their actual function" and "The newspaper carries with it an aura of a kind of citizenship committed to duties as well as rights. A society that simply did not contain a medium approximating the universality of the newspaper would be a society composed of consumers, not citizens."[128]

Apostles of the NCT appear less alarmed and suggest that print media dilemmas may be "uninteresting" because "that which is lost is not lost to consumers; rather it is lost to the owners of a particular set of capital goods embodying obsolete technology".[129] As to the "anxiety about the cultural implications of reducing Melville to magnetic tapes, or of relegating The Washington Post and Doonesberry entirely to television. . . .This may reflect a romantic attachment to the traditions of the printed page; it probably reflects elitism as well since electronic communications, as we now know them, are preeminently popular media. . ."[130]

However, the counter argument is that "New technologies of information are inextricably connected with new systems of government. In fact, they are nearly always used by government and change the nature of government before they are turned loose on society."[131] The NCT does not arrive in a vacuum and the lack of a debate on how it might affect the balkanization of America through narrow loyalties which dissolve the society,[132] or how it might affect the politics of the metropolis, is a serious omission.

Unfortunately, the unravelling of the local community and the restoration of a government for the new city is low on the public agenda. Local government is seen as a trivial circus and the escape from the city is encouraged by modern transportation and communications.

The modern city is defined as powerless and it is assumed that the sum total of the operations of the "market" will produce the desirable community. As one political scientist put it:[133]

> ". . .we are so completely possessed by the conception of the politically and economically eviscerated city of liberalism, capitalism and the nation-state that the older Greek, medieval renaissance and even early modern conceptions of the city as a self-determining cooperative for ordering and advancing the common life and well being of its citizens seems strange and well nigh utopian."

Norton Long reminds us that territorial loyalty has made Western man civilized and that it is foolish to ignore the need for a central place and medium to govern "the fragmented mass of the metropolitan area with a meaningful common political life".[134] He continues:

> "The values of citizenship and a rich civic life are not economic goods to be produced by the operations of the economy. The current trend to reduce citizenship, at least at the local level, to a sort of free-floating consumership, attests the serious decline in the appreciation of political values. This decline can undermine any effective base for a leadership capable of managing the conflicts that confront urban society."

Some hope for a new urbanity with a blend of metropolitan and neighborhood citizens aware and communicating in the public arena,[135] while there are fears the NCT will be used to escape community and its responsibility into the new "private future" where one might find the following:[136]

> "Alone in a centrally heated, air-conditioned capsule, drugged, fed with music and erotic imagery, the parts of his consciousness separated into components that reach everywhere and nowhere, the private citizen of the future will have become one with the end of effort and the triumph of sensation divorced from action. When the barbarians arrive they will find him, like some ancient Greek sage, lost in contemplation, terrified and yet fearless, <u>listening</u> to himself."

Summary:

1) The context of cities and urbanization is an ideal framework in which to explore the impact of new communications technology because the parallel forces of decentralization and specialization are at work. The decline of the traditional print city of mass media and the death of centrality are concurrent with the multiple centers and many mediums of what might be called the "mediapolis" of the post-industrial city and society.

2) The hope that new communications technology can be used as a utopian tool was indicated in the efforts in the 1960s to rebuild the old city, solve its problems and at the same time create a new city beyond it.

3) Established print media (like daily, central city newspapers) first responded to the urban crisis with support for social and political programs, but then adopted some of the new technology for media via such adjustments as the "electronic newspaper".

4) Use of the new technology by consumers is creating new communities of interest beyond those of geography, and this raises some dilemmas for both minorities, who may become even more segregated and isolated, and for the majorities, such as central city mayors who must govern the metropolis within severe political and governmental restrictions.

5) The emergence of pluralistic communities and multiple agendas and competing community images may create diversity, but may fracture the notion of a general public interest.

6) The power of the consumer as citizen may make a technocracy through such things as televoting and telecommuting, but this could create even greater alienation in society, weaken inter-personal contacts, reduce privacy and increase surveillance, and leave a common public interest at the mercy of the economic determinism of the consumer market.

7) The print media, especially central city dailies, retain a certain fixation with geography and centrality, but might adapt to changing urban conditions with more emphasis on processes and functions. One way might be through a comprehensive information "beat" combining media, education and perhaps the information "industry" of the post-industrial society.

8) New electronic media may develop the capacity for creating new community images to fit new realities. Such mental maps and electronic "communities" can create new "city limits" and new boundaries adjusted to radical changes in transportation and communications.

9) A local urbanization scenario projects and anticipates possible future impact of new technology and although more research is needed, it does provide a context for assessment in which the broad notion of society finds greater meaning in the local city and community.

10) This highly evaluative and critical perspective offers a combined barometer and seismograph to register important normative notions to guide further empirical studies.

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